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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to examine relationships between communication apprehension (CA) levels and the sending of messages within an organization. It was expected that high CA would be more prevalent among support personnel than among managers or professionals, and that high CAs would report less communication participation and satisfaction. It was also expected that high CAs could be distinguished from others based on reported message sending and receiving activity, and would predict for themselves little career advancement. Survey respondents were 118 citizens of a large midwestern community, employed by a variety of private industries and governmental agencies, who described their current employment situations and communication behaviors and completed a CA measure. The results indicated that high CAs were distinguished from others in the organization by job position, length of employment, communication participation, overall communication satisfaction, and future employment expectations. They were also distinguishable by the kinds of messages they sent most frequently. (HTH)

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HIGH APPREHENSIVES WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION: HOW AND WITH WHOM DO THEY TALK

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HIGH APPREHENSIVES WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION: HOW AND WITH WHOM DO THEY TALK

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication in organizations is widely considered to be necessary for both the attainment of organizational goals and individual productivity and satisfaction. Along with this extensive focus on communication has come an active interest in the complex influences and experiences which contribute to both effectiveness and satisfaction.

Among the numerous communication variables of interest, communication apprehension (CA) is generally considered to be an important influence on an individual's communication within the organization (McCroskey & Richmond, 1979). Generally defined as the individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with others, CA has been found to be meaningfully associated with such important organizational outcomes as occupation choice, perception of competence, job satisfaction, advancement and job retention. (Daly & McCroskey, 1975; Falcione, McCroskey & Daly, 1977; Scott, McCroskey & Sheahan, 1978). Although research consistently supports low participation in organizational communication by those high in CA, (McCroskey, 1977) no one theorizes that the high CA does not participate at all in the communication process. Given that high apprehensives must verbally participate to some degree within the organization, a major gap in the current body of research is an understanding of how and with whom the high CA communicates and the potential implications that a high CA communication style might have for organizational position and advancement. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore the types and contexts of message behavior that would differentiate: (1) the

high CA from others in the organization, (2) those with different employment expectations, and (3) those with different positions within the organization. Additionally, the study served to replicate previous findings which have related CA to organizational position, employment expectations, amount of verbal participation, and communication satisfaction.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Previous research supports the notion that along with those exhibiting high CA in the general population, organizations have substantial numbers of individuals who either avoid or withdraw from oral communication (Scott, McCroskey & Sheahan, 1978). The consequences for both individuals and organizations are numerous. For example, organization members high in CA have been found not only to prefer occupations with low communication requirements but to actually occupy such positions. Additionally, high CAs have reported that they are unlikely to be promoted and do not desire promotion. As expected, the opposite was true for those lower in CA. Further, workers low in CA recorded over 50 percent more years of employment than workers with high CA (Scott, McCroskey & Sheahan, 1978).

Although past research strongly indicates that high CAs will not move to increasingly complex levels of responsibility in most organizations, research fails to relate CA to basic ability. Specifically, CA has not been meaningfully related to either intelligence or aptitude (McCroskey & Richmond, 1979). High CAs, however, have consistently been perceived by others to be less competent and less effective leaders than their lower CA counterparts (McCroskey & Richmond, 1976). Although the reasons for these perceptions of the high CA are unclear, research has consistently found that high CAs will communicate less than others, and that quantity of

communication is positively related to perceptions of quality of communication. No one suggests, however, that communication apprehension is the only influence on the quantity and quality of individual communication within organizations. Types of messages, task demands, and organization role, in addition to CA, are but a few of the variables which previous research has identified as influential for individual behavior.

Communication types and functions, for example, have been described by numerous researchers (Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977; Katz & Kahn, 1966: Redding, 1972; Greenbaum, 1974). Most typologies identify messages which describe the rules, regulations, and controls of the organization; messages which enable the organization to change and innovate; messages which help individuals acquire a sense of belonging by integrating individual and organizational goals; and messages which inform and instruct in basic task requirements.

As with the CA construct, research relating message type to organizational level and job satisfaction has broad implications for understanding individual communication participation. For example, Schuler and Blank (1976) found that although informative and integrative communication were related to employee satisfaction, the degree of relationship varied by organizational level of employee. Specifically, informative communication was significantly more strongly related to both satisfaction and performance for employees at high levels within the organization than for those at lower levels. Integrative messages, however, were found to be more satisfying for middle and lower levels than for higher organizational levels.

Given this somewhat complex picture of potential influences on quality of communication within organizations, questions arise as to the relationship of CA to message types, organizational level, and overall satisfaction. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine relationships between CA levels and the sending and receiving of regulative, informative, integrative, and innovative messages for an employed populati of managers, professionals, and support personnel. Specifically it was expected that high CA would be more prevalent for support personnel than managers or professionals and that high CAs would report less communication participation and satisfaction. Additionally, it was expected that high CAs could be distinguished from others based on reported message sending and receiving activity and would predict for themselves little career advancement. The study further examined the relationship of types of reported message sending and receiving activity to present organizational position and future employment expectations.

METHOD

Sample

Survey respondents were 118 members of a large midwestern community who were employed by a variety of private industries and governmental agencies. Occupations for the sample included managers (11 males, 14 females), professionals (7 males, 42 females), and support personnel (14 males, 30 females). Respondents had been working for an average of 14.56 years and had been with their present employer an average of 5.19 years.

Procedures and Instruments

Respondents were asked to participate in a one-time survey. Questionnaires were distributed through personnel departments and self administered by the individual employee. The overall response rate was 85 percent.

Respondents were asked to describe their current employment, communication behaviors, and complete McCroskey's (1982) PRCA-24. The description of current employment involved indicating the type of organization they worked for (non-profit, private industry, educational, government, medical), the number of years they had been in the work force, the number of years they had been with their present employer, their current position within the organization, and their employment expectations. Individuals were categoriezed according to their employment expectations as either staying in the same position for the foreseeable future, promoted to the next level, or leaving their current position by means other than promotion.

Self reports of the frequency of communications were obtained via 32 questions which were structured into two 4 x 4 matrixes (message type by context). One matrix, or 16 of the items, asked respondents to indicate the frequency of message sending while the second matrix asked them to report frequency with which they received messages. That is, respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which they sent and received each message type in each context. The four message types were: (1) regulative (messages dealing with rules, regulations, and policies), (2) informative (information concerning the job, product, or plans),

(3) innovative (messages concerning new ways of doing things), and (4) integrative (messages dealing with relationships between individual and organizational goals, support, trust, and confidence). The four contexts were communication to one's organizational superiors, peers, subordinates, and personal communication.

In addition to reporting the frequency of each message type in each context three questions were used to measure overall verbal participation in the organization. Each question asked respondents to compare their amount of verbal participation with others in the organization on a five-point scale ranging from "less than others" to "more than others". The first question asked respondents to compare themselves with their peers, while the second and third questions asked them to compare themselves with their subordinates and superiors. These responses were subsequently averaged to form an overall measure of verbal participation.

Lastly, four five-point scales ranging from "low satisfaction" to "highly satisfied" were averaged to form a measure of communication satisfaction within the organization. The questions asked respondents to indicate their satisfaction with the organization's handling of communication, their own handling of communication, communication with peers, and communication with subordinates.

Data Analysis

Both univariate and multivariate analyses were applied to the data. Six one-way ANOVA's and three Pearson correlations were used for the portion of the study which attempted to replicate previous research. The dependent measures for the ANOVA's were communication apprehension,

communication satisfaction, and amount of verbal participation within the organization. The two independent variables were organizational position (manager, professional, support personnel) and employment expectations (same position, promoted, leave position). Although two-way ANOVA's or MANOVA would generally be more desireable analyses, the small and disproportional cell sizes cautioned against their use. Pearson correlations were used in an attempt to replicate the relationships between CA and self reports of verbal participation within the organization, communication satisfaction, and length of employment.

Six multivariate discriminate analyses (MDA) were used for the portion of the study that explored the relationship between reports of communication within the organization and communication apprehension, employment expectations, and organizational position. The grouping variable for the first set of analyses was communication apprehension. Individuals were classified as high apprehensives if their score on the PRCA-24 exceeded 72. Moderate apprehensives were those with scores between 60 and 71, while low apprehensives had scores below 59.

The grouping variables for the second and third set of MDA's were employment expectations (same position, promotion, leave position) and organizational position (manager, professional, support personnel). For each grouping variable, two MDA's were performed. The first used reports of message types sent as discriminating variables while the second used types of messages received as discriminating variables.

RESULTS

Univariate Analyses

The PRCA-24 was highly reliable (Cronbach's alpha = .926), while the reliabilities of the verbal participation (Cronbach's alpha = .660) and communication satisfaction (Cronbach's alpha = .698) measures were moderate. Higher reliabilities for the participation and satisfaction measures were not expected because of the small number of items in each measure. Additionally, each scale item measured satisfaction and participation in different contexts.

The one way ANOVA's indicated that CA was significantly related to both position within the organization and employment expectations (Table 1). Examination of the means with Tukey's HSD indicated that support personnel were significantly higher in CA than either managers or professionals, but managers and professionals were not significantly different in CA (Table 2). Similarly, those people who anticipated leaving their present position were significantly higher in CA than those who either expected to leave their position via promotion or stay in their present position. Both organizational position and employment expectations, however, were unrelated to communication satisfaction. Given a moderate effect size (f = .20) and alpha level of .05 the organizational position analysis had a power of .62, while the employment expectation analysis had a power of .58.

In terms of the amount of participation, the F-ratio for position was significant (Table 1). Follow-up analysis (Tukey HSD) indicated that individuals who were going to stay in their present position reported

significantly higher levels of communication participation than those who anticipated leaving their current position by means other than promotion. Future employment expectations, however, were unrelated to respondents' level of participation (Table 1). For a moderate effect size (f = .20) and alpha level of .05 the employment analysis had a power of .58.

The correlations between CA and reports of verbal participation, communication satisfaction, and duration of employment essentially replicated previous findings. The higher a person's CA the lower their participation (r = -.444, p < .001), satisfaction (r = -.195, p < .05), number of years with their present employer (r = -.313, p < .001), and number of years employed (r = -.203, p < .05).

Discriminate Analyses

A total of six MDA's were performed. The grouping variable for the first two MDA's was CA (low, moderate, high). The discriminating variables were types of messages sent for the first MDA and types of messages received for the second MDA. For messages sent, four message types formed a single significant discriminate function with a canonical correlation of .375 (p < .01). Examination of the standardized discriminate function coefficients (Table 3) indicated that the function was primarily characterized by personal innovative messages and to a lesser extent by integrative messages. The function, therefore, was labeled innovative/integrative. Collectively, these discriminating variables indicated that high apprehensives were significantly different from both low (F 4, 93 = 3.52, p < .01) and moderate apprehensives (F 4, 93 = 3.36, p < .05). Low and moderate apprehensives, however, were

not significantly different from each other (F 4, 93 = 1.50, p > .05).

The group centroids (Table 4) revealed that high apprehensives were less likely than either low or moderate apprehensives to send personal innovative or peer integrative messages. High apprehensives, however, did report sending more messages concerning rules and regulations to their superiors and more integrative messages in their personal communication than their less apprehensive counterparts. Examination of the stepwise entry of the discriminating variables, however, indicated that the tendency for high apprehensives to send personal integrative messages was not significant.

The second MDA used types of message received to discriminate among low, moderate, and high apprehensives. Receiving integrative and informative messages from peers formed a single significant function with a canonical correlation of .328 (p < .05). Examination of the standardized discriminate function coefficients (Table 3) and the group centroids (Table 4) for the peer integrative/informative function indicated that the moderate apprehensives tended to receive the most integrative messages from their peers, while the low and high apprehensives tended to receive informative messages from their peers. Taken together, these two discriminating variables indicated that moderate apprehensives were significantly different from high apprehensives (F 2, 96 = 5.79, p < .01) but not significantly different from low apprehensives (F 2, 96 = 2.53, p < .10). The low and high apprehensives did not differ significantly (F 2, 96 = 2.42 p > .05).

The grouping variable for the second set of MDA's was employment

expectations (same position, promotion expected, leave position). When types of messages sent were used as discriminating variables a nonsignificant canonical correlation of .318 was found. Furthermore, none of the groups were significantly different from each other on the discriminating function. When types of messages received were used as discriminating variables personal integrative and innovative messages from peers resulted in a significant discriminate function with a canonical correlation of .336, ($p < .05$).

The standardized discriminate function coefficients (Table 3) in conjunction with the group centroids for the personal integrative/innovative function (Table 4) indicated that individuals who expected to be promoted reported receiving more integrative messages than those who expected to stay in the same position or leave their present position by means other than promotion. Those who expected to stay in their present positions or leave reported receiving more innovative messages from their peers than those who expected to be promoted. Collectively, the two discriminating variables indicated that the group which expected to be promoted was significantly different from those who expected to stay in the same position (F 2, 92 = 4.95, $p < .01$), or leave their position (F 2, 92 = 3.50, $p < .05$). The stay and leave groups were not significantly different from each other (F 2, 92 = .17, $p > .05$).

The grouping variable for the final set of MDA's was organization position (manager, professional, support personnel). When messages sent were used as discriminating variables three message types combined in a significant discriminate function with a canonical correlation of .392,

$p < .01$. The function was labeled "regulative" because all three messages were regulative, but differed in to whom the messages were sent (i. e., superior, subordinate, personal). The function differentiated managers from support personnel (F 3, 98 = 5.30, $p < .01$), and professionals from support personnel (F 3, 98 = 3.20, $p < .05$), but did not differentiate managers from professionals (F 3, 98 = .90, $p > .05$). More specifically, when the standardized discriminate function coefficients (Table 3) and group centroids (Table 4) were examined they indicated that managers sent their subordinates regulative messages, while the support personnel reciprocated by sending their superiors regulative messages. Managers and professionals also sent more regulative messages in their personal communication behavior than support personnel.

The last MDA used messages received to discriminate among organizational positions. Two significant functions emerged. Functions one and two had significant canonical correlations of .289, ($p < .05$, and .272), ($p < .05$) respectively. The standardized discriminant function coefficients (Table 3) indicated that function one loaded primarily on regulative messages from one's superior while function two loaded on personal integrative and personal regulative messages. When these coefficients were rotated, however, it became clear that function one was a regulative function while function two was a personal integrative function (Table 3).

The group centroids for the regulative function (function one) indicated that managers received few regulative messages from their superiors compared to professionals and support personnel. The centroids

for the integrative function (function two), however, indicated that managers received the most integrative messages in their personal communication, followed by support personnel and lastly professionals. When taken together the two functions differentiated managers from both professionals (F 3, 99 = 2.88, $p < .05$), and support personnel (F 3, 99 = 3.00, $p < .05$). Professionals and support personnel were marginally different (F 3, 99 = 2.67, $p < .06$).

DISCUSSION

As expected from previous research, high CAs were distinguished from others in the organization by job position, length of employment, communication participation, overall communication satisfaction, and future employment expectations. Specifically, those high in CA were more likely to be support personnel than managers or professionals and had spent less time in the work force and with their present employer than their lower CA counterparts. Additionally, high CAs reported less communication participation and satisfaction than others and expected more than others to leave their present positions rather than remain in current jobs or advance to higher levels.

In addition to a lower overall participation rate, high CAs also could be distinguished from their lower CA counterparts by specific message sending and receiving activities. For message sending behaviors, high CAs were characterized by low levels of personal innovative and peer integrative messages and high levels of regulative messages to supervisors. Participation in informative message sending did not differ by CA levels. The implications for both the individual and the

organization are numerous. Reported message sending activity for high CAs may fulfill basic task requirements (regulations to supervisors and information to others) but may not permit them to demonstrate their ability for problem solving (innovative messages) or their desire to work well with their peers (peer integrative messages). Additionally, the high apprehensive may send more regulative messages to their supervisors because they are less likely to be the supervisor than lower apprehensives.

Message receiving activity again demonstrated the complex nature of the high CAs' communication participation. With the second MDA forming a distinct peer integrative/informative function, high CAs did not differ significantly from low CAs. Those moderate in CA, however, reported more peer integrative messages then either low or high apprehensives. This is probably because the potentially sensitive nature of integrative messages makes them risky to disclose to the highly verbal low apprehensive. Conversely, the high apprehensive is unlikely to receive such messages because they are also less likely to send them and therefore not have promoted the reciprocal disclosure of integrative messages.

When message sending and receiving activity were evaluated together, a participation pattern which potentially under-utilizes the abilities of high CAs emerged. Specifically, high CAs participated in basic informative and regulative exchanges with the latter particularly true in messages sent to supervisors. The high CA did not, however, either send or receive peer integrative messages and chartacterized their own communication as low in innovation. Given this pattern for high CAs,

organizational outcomes such as low position levels, low overall communication participation and satisfaction, and negative employment expectations were not surprising.

When organizational outcomes such as employment expectations and organizational position were related to message activity without consideration of CA levels, the importance of integrative communication for vertical mobility in organizations became apparent. Those individuals who predicted vertical mobility or those who had experienced vertical mobility (managers) were more likely than all others to have been recipients of integrative messages. This is consistent with the earlier findings that high CAs, who reported less participation in integrative communication than others, were more likely to be support personnel and predict little vertical mobility for themselves.

With the lack of integrative communication an important characteristic of the communication pattern for high CAs in organizations, strategies for improving this message exchange may be central to a better utilization of the abilities of high apprehensives. As such the importance of this research may lie in attempts not just to understand the message activity of the high CA but the message exchange patterns of individuals whose organizational outcomes and expectations are substantially different from high CAs. From this perspective, additional work is needed to explain why integrative messages distinguish high CAs as well as predict organizational position and expected vertical mobility. Finally, the integrative exchange, which is missing for the high CA and prevalent for those with management responsibilities, should be related to other message

types and contexts to determine whether integrative messages in particular operate as a stimulus to environments where satisfying regulative, informative or innovative message exchanges occur.

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Table 1

F-Ratios for Position and Employment Expectations

	Position			Employment Expectations		
	df	F	eta^2	df	F	eta^2
Dependent Measure						
Communication Apprehension	2,110	6.15**	.10	2,102	5.04**	.09
Communication Satisfaction	2,106	1.50	.03	2,98	2.13	.04
Communication Participation	2,105	5.18**	.09	2,97	1.78	.02

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Table 2

Means for Communication Apprehension, Satisfaction and Participation by Position and Employment Expectation Groups

	Apprehension		Satisfaction		Participation	
	n	X	n	X	n	X
Position						
Manager	23	55.65	23	3.13	22	3.46
Professional	46	56.22	47	2.85	48	3.25
Support Personnel	44	65.57	39	2.94	38	2.98
Employment Expectations						
Same Position	43	57.70	43	3.12	43	3.33
Promotion	39	58.39	36	2.86	36	3.18
Leave Position	23	68.74	22	2.84	21	3.10

Table 3

Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients

	Function 1	Function 2
Communication Apprehension		
Message Sent		N.S.D.
Personal Innovative	1.024	
Personal Integrative	- .494	
Superior Regulative	- .575	
Peer Integtative	.531	
Messages Received		N.S.D.
Peer Informative	- .787	
Peer Integrative	1.128	
Employment Expectations		
Messages Sent	N.S.D.	N.S.D.
Messages Received		N.S.D.
Personal Integrative	.899	
Peer Innovative	- .808	
Organizational Position		
Messages Sent		N.S.D.
Personal Regulative	.550	
Superior Regulative	- .552	
Subordinate Regulative	.791	
Messages Received		
Personal Regulative	.546	- .854
Personal Integrative	.588	.956
Superior Regulative	- 1.009	.240

Table 3 - Continued:

Rotated Coefficients		
Personal Regulative	- .895	- .477
Personal Integrative	- .044	1.122
Superior Regulative	.997	- .286

Table 4

Discriminant Functions At Group Centroids for Communication Apprehension, Employment Expectations, and Organizational Position

Groups	Messages Sent	Messages Received
Communication Apprehension		
Low Apprehensives	.179	- .017
Moderate Apprehensives	.266	.472
High Apprehensives	- .774	- .518
Employment Expectations	N.S.D.	
Same Position		- .267
Promotion Expected		.436
Leave Position		- .264
Organizational Position		
	Function 1	Function 2
Manager	.554	- .201 .257
Professional	.157	- .018 - .223
Support Personnel	- .534	.141 .118